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**Viewpoint**  
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## Debate on withdrawal from Iraq is necessary

U.S. TROOPS have done everything we've asked of them in Iraq. Their bravery, professionalism and devotion to duty have been exemplary. Thanks to their sacrifices, Iraqis are well on their way to shaping their own destiny and taking responsibility for their country's security.

We recently witnessed the promulgation of a new Iraqi constitution, and elections for a duly constituted government are set for next month. With these developments, increasing numbers of Americans (including members of Congress, many of whom voted in 2002 for the invasion) believe it is time to start bringing U.S. troops home and handing over responsibility for Iraq's security to Iraqis themselves.

Unfortunately, President Bush and his administration appear determined to maintain as large a U.S. military presence in Iraq for as long as they can. This burden falls especially heavily on Reserve and National Guard personnel, whose lives, careers and families have been in limbo over the course of two or even three deployments. The Bush administration needs to stop kidding itself: If Iraqis can't start taking over responsibility 2 1/2 years after their liberation, when will they ever be ready? If the administration can't answer that question forthrightly, then we have to contemplate the unpleasant possibility that we've become trapped in a quagmire with no exit in sight.

IT'S TIME to lay down a time line for bringing our troops home. A drawdown schedule will provide Iraqis an incentive to strengthen their political institutions and security forces to the point where they no longer depend on the United States. Delaying withdrawal only perpetuates the status quo. The erosion of our military capacity will accelerate while strategic challenges in other parts of

the world become more serious. The estrangement of longtime friends and allies will grow deeper, and the forces of Islamic radicalism will continue to feed off our presence in Iraq. The U.S. casualty toll will keep rising, and the strain on troops will mount to intolerable levels.

These reasons are why Rep. Walter Jones (R-N.C.) and I introduced House Joint Resolution 55. It calls on the president to announce a timetable for withdrawal, which would commence no later than Oct. 1, a little less than a year from now. That gives the Iraqis time to complete the training and development of their own army and police forces. Since the introduction of our bipartisan resolution, Rep. Jones and I have been joined by more than 60 other House members who have signed on as co-sponsors.

The American people deserve a full and open discussion of these issues. We believe the resolution is the appropriate catalyst for that discourse, the public's elected representatives have the duty to conduct the discussion, and the floor of Congress is the rightful place for it. However, the president and his allies in the congressional leadership refuse to bring the measure to the floor. What are they afraid of? I believe the answer lies in their discomfort with the prospect of a no-holds-barred discussion of the policy drift that is making hostages of our troops. Equally unwelcome will be the inevitable questions about the untruths, miscalculations and manipulation of intelligence used (and which continue to be used) to justify the case for war and continued occupation.

Now that the facts behind the war and its consequences have become clearer, Congress must face up to its responsibilities. Republican leaders in Congress must stop the stonewalling. To break the blockade and move the discussion about bringing home our troops to the floor of Congress, I have invoked a seldom used House rule. On Nov. 10, I filed what is known as a Discharge Petition for House Joint Resolution 55. When a majority of the House (218 members) signs the petition, the speaker will have no option but to bring it to the floor for debate and a vote. As long as the GOP leadership continues in its refusal to permit an open debate, a discharge petition is our only hope for presenting the case for bringing home the troops on the floor of the people's House in full view of the public.

Events have brought us to the point where support for the troops means giving them a timetable for return to their families. They have earned our thanks. They deserve a homecoming with full honors for a job well done. Indefinite continuation of the policy of open-ended deployment is a disservice to our men and women in uniform. They deserve a national policy worthy of their sacrifice and dedication. A full and open debate of House Resolution 55 provides the opportunity to meet that obligation.

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